

ON CALIFORNIA'S PRIORITIES

Privatize UC to balance the state budget?

Undermine UC, undermine California's future

John Garamendi

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Even before next year's state budget shortfall was estimated at \$8.6 billion, I began to hear the budget ax yet again taking aim at California's students.

Many in Sacramento are looking for solutions that will increase revenue for the state and rectify the state's ongoing "structural budget deficit" - even going so far as to suggest privatizing the University of California system.

History is riddled with failed privatization schemes, including energy deregulation in the 1980s, where we saw costs and fees surge, with the burden usually falling on the backs of our states most vulnerable. In this case, you can be sure the burden will fall squarely on our students.

As a trustee of UC and the California State University systems, I'm determined to change the course of this debate.

There is no question that California's economic future depends on a solid physical infrastructure - roads, bridges and aqueducts, and I'm proud that California's voters have spoken loudly and clearly about their priorities in this area.

Now we must turn our attention to the most critical investment in the future that we can and must make - preparing our children to compete in a 21st-century economy.

Our public education system is a vital part of our infrastructure and our collective future - bringing together the hopes and opportunities of the next generation; the economic viability and growth prospects for our state; and the ability to meet the needs of our citizens and maintain our capacity for future advancement.

Recent decisions by the UC Board of Regents and CSU Trustees have increased student fees in an attempt to increase revenue. Continuing down this path will have grave and real consequences for our future.

Consider the incredible contributions the UC system alone brings to our golden state. Beyond educating and training the leaders of tomorrow, the UC system has a vast effect on our economy, job creation and the production of intellectual capital.

UC's statewide economic impact is striking. In 2002 alone, UC triggered more than \$16 billion in economic growth and brought in \$4 billion in state and local tax revenue. The system has directly and indirectly created nearly 370,000 jobs, which represents more than 2 percent of all employment in California.

On a national scale, three UC campuses ranked in the top five among public and private universities in research, social mobility and services. For 12 years in a row, the system has developed more patents than any other university system in the world.

It is clear that our UC system provides immeasurable contributions to our state, our nation and the world. We can't continue to make short-sighted decisions that undermine the quality, availability and future growth of this remarkable public institution.

Most can agree that education is the "great equalizer," the one immutable variable that gives every child a chance at a healthy, vibrant and successful future. But continued, sharp tuition increases will put these great institutions out of reach for far too many of our students, and reverse the progress we've made in accelerating the economic progress of California's underserved populations. Tuition and fee increases at California's public universities have doubled since 2002, with total costs for room, board, and books, tuition and fees averaging of \$23,000 per year for students attending UC.

I agree that our universities need more revenue; however I strongly believe that we must stop balancing the budget on the backs of our students.

As we look for solutions to the state's budget problems, we cannot eliminate those infrastructure investments that guarantee a growing economy and a just society. We must continue the commitment of previous generations to invest in our students and our public universities.

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